

Joseph Simone
Rosalie Griffith
Tues. Feb. 14, 2012

Annotated Text Set: Exploring Themes of Witchcraft

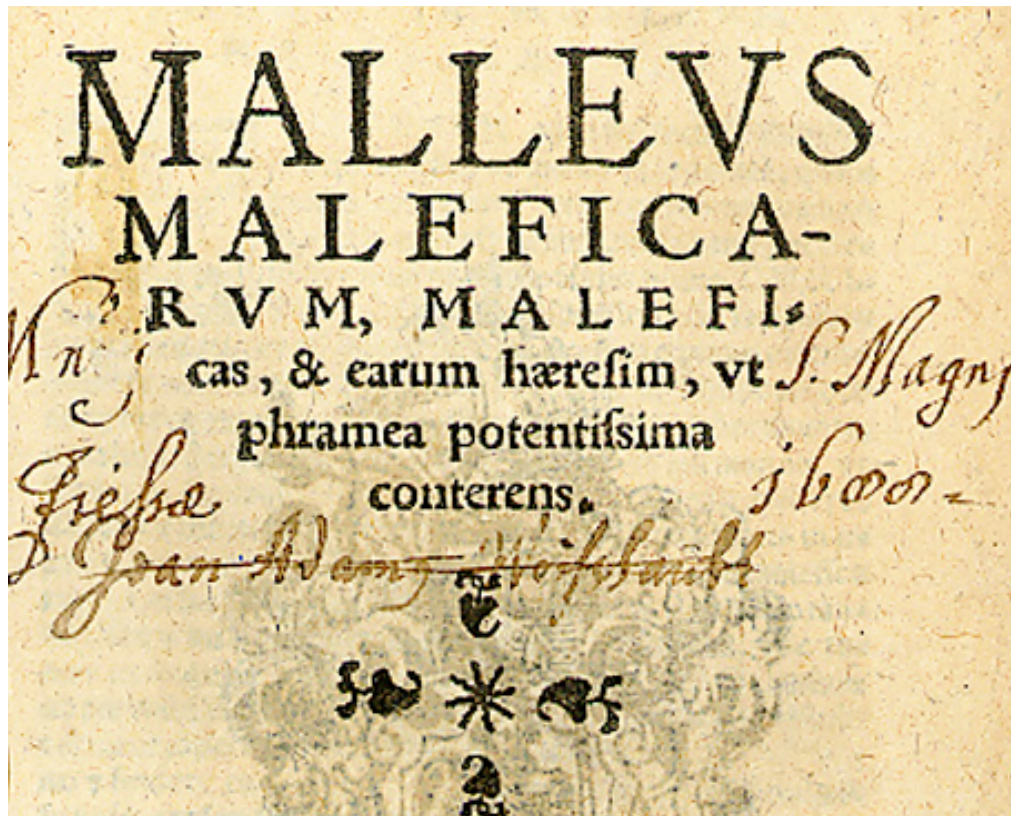
Throughout history, magic has been a crucial and sometime controversial phenomenon. Before Christianity, many people in the Western world practised religions which included magic or sorcery. During the years following Christ, many Western anthropologists discovered that many non-Western communities still used magic often in their societies. However, with the rise of Christianity in the Western world, any practice outside the realm of Christian doctrine was considered “evil” or “Satanic”. Many people still practiced their former pagan traditions which included magic and were punished for it. During the Middle Ages and Early Modern period, Europe went into a frenzy and thousands of people were murdered because they were believed to be “witches”. “Witchcraft” became an evil form of magic for Christian Europe, and fear and mass hysteria caused the death of innocent people. Today the term “witch” still holds its negative connotation and certain stereotypes. However, there are others who consider themselves witches or “Wiccans” which is its own religion/practice.

The toxic idea of the “evil witch” has bled into our generation and is a common theme in various genres. Often people fail to realize the dark history behind this idea. This text set will explore briefly the history of the evil witch and what she/he is, and then how witchcraft is used in contemporary texts.

Russell, Jeffrey B., and Brooks Alexander. *A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics & Pagans*.
2nd ed. London: Thames & Hudson, 2007.

1. Historical Treatise

The Malleus Maleficarum - Heinrich Kramer & James Sprenger



Summary

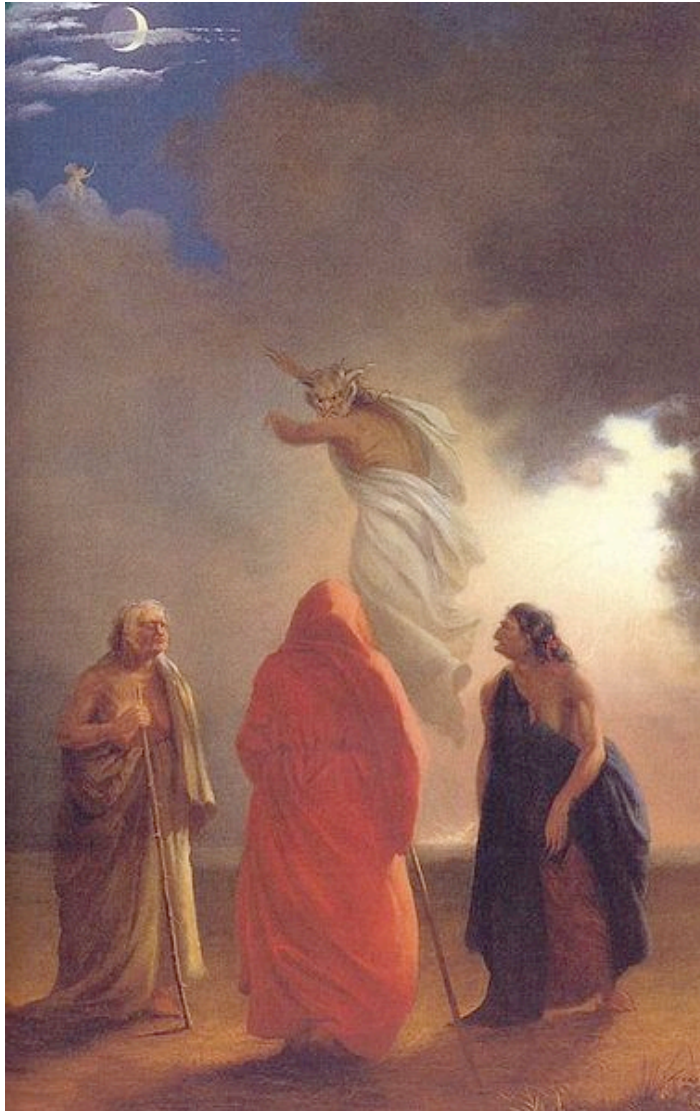
This book is a manual or treatise on witches written in the 15th century during the time of the witch craze in Europe. It describes in detail what a witch is, who she is, what she does, why she does what she does, and most chillingly, how to identify and catch her. This single book outlines all of the stereotypes of witches such as the Sabbath, flying around at night, cauldrons, and sacrificing babies. The scary part is that this book was actually used in Renaissance courts to persecute innocent people. If a person fit the criteria of this manual, they were murdered. The book outlines how people of the time created a villain, the witch, as a scapegoat to make them feel safer.

Rationale

Times were tough and it must have given people some strange peace of mind to know that by killing witches they were eradicating evil to make a better world. The actual inquisitors did not all use this book, but it was published various times. This book might be one of the most clearly misogynistic pieces of writing of all time and is basically fiction, but it is crucial to read when studying witchcraft. When people dress up their children like witches for Halloween, it is doubtful that they are cognizant of the extreme horror that occurred in order to create that fun stereotype. This book would be educational for all people who only know witchcraft from Harry Potter.

2. Play

Macbeth - Shakespeare



The above painting of the witches conjuring a vision is by William Rimmer.

Summary

This text set was supposed to be filled with contemporary texts. However, since Shakespeare is a staple writer used in high school classrooms, I felt that this would be appropriate.

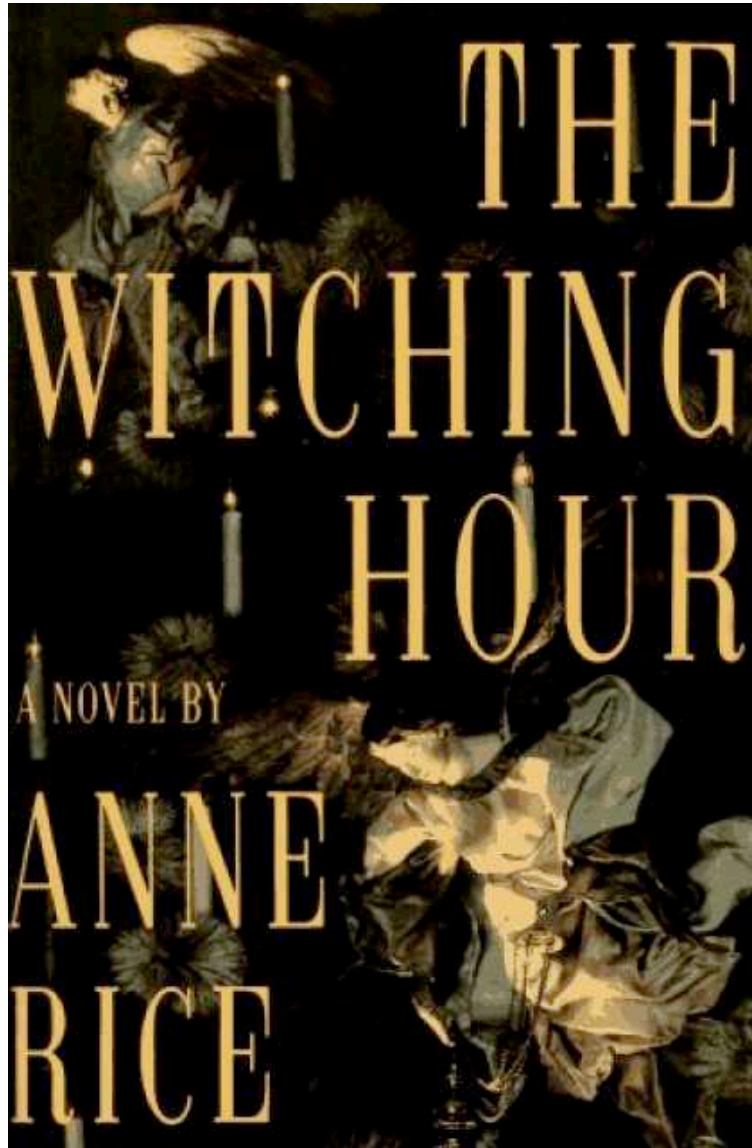
Macbeth and his wife commit regicide and they eventually fall. There are three witches in this play that have a very important role. Firstly, they hold many characteristics of the evil witch such as being old hags. Secondly, they can divine the future. The prophecy about Macbeth is referenced more than once and is used as foreshadowing. Thirdly, they are magic. They create apparitions for the characters.

Rationale

As mentioned, Macbeth is often studied in high school classrooms. The three witches are famous and integral to the plot. Their presence as evil shows how they were viewed at the time. They are the worst of the worst and cause destruction. They tempt Macbeth to kill Duncan by showing him that he is destined to be king. They live the stereotype that witches are evil women that whisper in men's ears causing them to fall.

3. Novel

The Witching Hour - Anne Rice



Summary

This extensive novel chronicles the lives of a line of witches. Most of this book is outlining the separate lives of each witch as the gene gets passed on. The main character, Rowan Mayfair, has had spontaneous experiences of her magic that she does not understand. The author gives the reader the secretive history of her family until Rowan eventually discovers it herself. Early in the book, a man named Michael saves Rowan from drowning and is accidentally imbued with some of her power. They eventually fall in love and get married. A spirit Lasher tries to give birth to himself via Rowan and Michael and succeeds. This plot continues in the next volume of the trilogy.

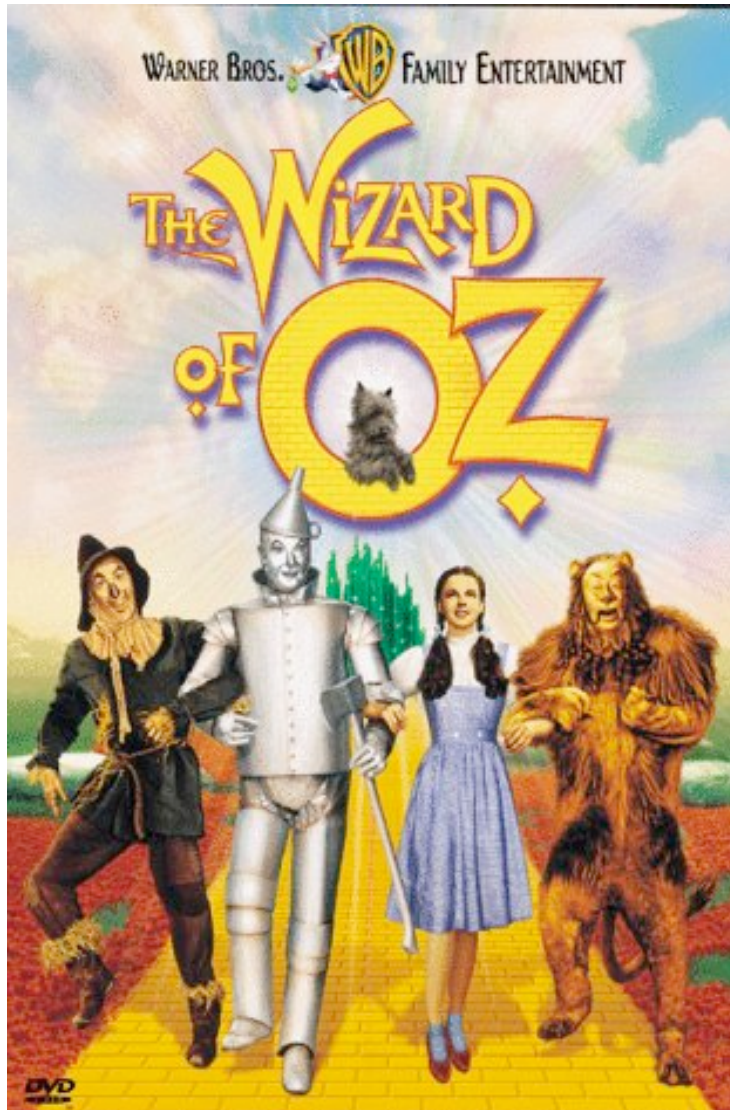
Rationale

The important thing about this novel is that the witch is still used as a terrible person. Rowan was born into her power but eventually ends up doing terrible things. She is able to use her power to kill people. Each witch' life story shows them using their power to rob, murder, and wreak havoc on

their family. The author knows that the word "witch" still often strikes fear in people's hearts; and she used this to her advantage when writing this horror piece. This is a perfect example of witchcraft as "horror". Witchcraft has now evolved from an historical occurrence to fictional horror.

4. Movie

The Wizard of Oz



Summary

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz was originally a children's book which was then adapted to a play, and again into the infamous movie. The movie was made famous by Judy Garland's iconic performance and by being one of the first movies to be filmed in Technicolor. Young Dorothy has a dream that a tornado takes her entire house to the colourful land of Oz. People from her life are transformed into fantasy characters such as a scarecrow, a tin man, a lion, and of course, a witch. She and her friends travel along the yellow brick road to meet the Wizard of Oz who can take Dorothy back to Kansas. Dorothy defeats the Wicked Witch of the East because her house landed on her at the beginning of the movie. However, the Wicked Witch of the West still lives and tries to foil Dorothy's plan. Dorothy eventually defeats her and finds her way back home, waking up in her bed.

Rationale

There are three witches in this movie. The two wicked witches

from the east and west are used as villains. They are evil archetypes of the "witch trials" witch. However, being a children's book, they are more campy than terrifying. The interesting character in this movie is Glinda, the Good Witch of the North. She is still magical and is still called a witch. However, she uses her powers for the forces of good. She helps Dorothy and wants to see the evil witches defeated. She is dressed like a fairy princess and is not an old hag. In this movie, the witch is no longer completely tied to its dark past but has become simply a person who has magical powers, good or evil.

5. Musical

Wicked



Summary

This famous musical was originally written as a novel called, *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* by Gregory Maguire. The novel was a spin-off of the Wizard of Oz story. The musical tells the tale of Elphaba and Glinda and how they became the wicked and good witches. Elphaba is seen as a normal girl except for her green skin. She is teased at school but befriended by popular girl Glinda. Elphaba gets involved in an animal rights movement. She is eventually alienated and becomes the Wicked Witch of the West.

Rationale

This musical is not only famous but absolutely fantastic. It deals with witchcraft in the same manner as The Wizard of Oz: good vs. evil and with lots of camp. This story has almost no relation to the history of witches. These people are simply magical and it is completely normalized. Witchcraft has now entered the fantasy genre. The audience enjoys watching these super human beings that have powers we can never have. This is a far cry from the *Malleus Maleficarum*. Being a witch is no longer demonized.

6. Television Show

Buffy the Vampire Slayer



Summary

The main character Willow and her girlfriend Tara are witches in this show. They are not good or evil, but neutral. Willow is seen using her power neutrally, for good, and for evil. It is the choice of the witch because there exists black magic and white magic. The power of these witches comes from ancient texts and incantations and some of them are taken straight from actual historical books. In this show, being a witch is used as a metaphor for being different, for sex, for craving power, and also for drug addiction.



Rationale

In this TV show, witchcraft is seen as something “counterculture”. In a world where the supernatural is real, being a witch is possible and accessible to teenagers. Many teens in real life experiment with different religions. Witchcraft seems to be popular because it is a rebellion against the imposed normalcy of Christianity or other institutionalized religions. The teen witch is often a rebel. Witchcraft also promises power, which is something that the average teenager would crave after feeling insecure and powerless at school. The teen witches on this show also happen to be lesbians, which further emphasizes their counterculture status.

7. Book/Movie Series

Harry Potter

Summary

This is a popular text that I might not use in a classroom, but it is worth mentioning. Harry Potter is an abused child who discovers that he is a wizard and is taken to a special school for people like him. He learns to hone his magical skills and use them for good. However, there are people who have thirsted for power and become evil. Harry must defeat the wizard who wants to kill him.

Rationale

It is hard not to include this series in this list just because of its sheer popularity. In this series, the characters live in a world full of witchcraft. It is normal and a natural genetic occurrence. Again, the witch is no longer intrinsically evil, but simply a magical person. The witch is seen almost as elite, a superhuman. It is not a choice to be a witch, but a quality you are born with. The good versus evil motif is still present but it is a choice. A witch is not born evil, but can do what he/she wants with the power. In this series, being a witch is about having powers such as telekinesis, teleportation, and levitation. It is not connected to religion at all.



8. Song

"Burn the Witch" - Queens of the Stone Age

Summary

"Burn the Witch" is a song from Queens of the Stone Age's album *Lullabies that Paralyze*. The lyrics describe the witch trials. The album artwork mimics that of Francisco Goya who painted about European witchcraft.

Rationale

Witchcraft has not been represented in contemporary music very often. Some anti-Christian music such as Marilyn Manson has some witchcraft references. This song however sings a poem about a witch on trial. It is beautiful and chilling poetry. Instead of adopting the modern view of witchcraft that we see in Harry Potter, Queens of the Stone Age chose the historical approach and wrote lyrics that allow us to sympathize with the horrors of the history of witchcraft.



Lyrics

Holding hands
Skipping like a stone
On our way
To see what we have done
The first to speak
Is the first to lie
The children cross
Their hearts & hope to die

Bite your tongue
Swear to keep your mouth shut

Ask yourself
Will i burn in Hell?
Then write it down
& cast it in the well
There they are
The mob it cries for blood
To twist and tale
Into fire wood
Fan the flames
With a little lie
Then turn your cheek
Until the fire dies
The skin it peels
Like the truth, away
What it was
I will never say...

Bite your tongue, swear to keep
Keep your mouth shut
Make up something
Make up something good...
Holding hands
Skipping like a stone
Burn the witch
Burn to ash & bone

9. Religion/Tradition

Wicca

Summary

Wicca is modern pagan religion/tradition that was developed in England in the 20th century. The beliefs of Wiccans vary greatly from person to person. This religion combines aspects of various past pagan religions. The god and goddess are common deities that balance each other similarly to yin and yang. Wiccans often believe in reincarnation, but not necessarily. Wiccans often practise magic by casting spells. Some Wiccans believe that magic is supernatural; and others believe it is more about using the five senses vividly to achieve results. There is no moral or ethical code to being Wiccan with the exception of the common Wiccan rede: "An it harm none, do what ye will." The pentagram is used in pop culture as a symbol of evil, but it is not evil in Wicca. It is simply a symbol of the religion.



Rationale

Wiccans are modern "witches". They still use the term "witch" despite its negative connotations and connections to the European witch craze. This religion and magical practice is where Paganism or witchcraft has evolved. Wicca is still not mainstream however. The Harry Potter view of witches seems to be more common knowledge of the general public than this actual practised religion.

10. Play

The Crucible - Arthur Miller

Summary

This play is a reenactment of the Salem witch trials at the end of the 17th century. While the witch craze in Europe was starting to cool down a little bit, this gruesome event occurred in Massachusetts. Reverend Parris' daughter Betty goes dancing in a forest with a black slave named Tituba. She suddenly ends up in a coma and exhibits other strange behaviour. The people of the town think she is bewitched. Tituba confesses to speaking with the devil, and the other two girls begin naming people in the town who have done the same. This sends the entire town into a frenzy and many people were murdered.

Rationale

This is a dramatization of actual historical events. However, some of the characters' personalities were created by Miller. That being said, this play is an accurate representation of the witch craze. This play and movie provide more historically accurate knowledge about the history of witchcraft. Witchcraft is not a motif but the topic of this piece.

